



**INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY**

**D**OES THE INDIVIDUAL EVER FEEL LOST in relation to the broad needs of the community? Jewish law provides us with teachings concerning the detailed organisation of our lives. There is no doubt that if properly carried out, these create a communal or even global atmosphere of great beauty and harmony. But what about me as an individual? Where am I?

We can gain some insight into this idea in relation to a concept which concerns this time of year, the beginning of the month of Nissan, in the two weeks before Pesach.

The liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt had several goals. One was that they should receive the Torah on Mount Sinai. This took place seven weeks after the Exodus. Another was that they should build the Sanctuary, the prototype of the Temple. This was carried out some time later under close instruction from Moses.

After months of work, finally it was ready. On the first of Nissan, fifty weeks after leaving Egypt, the dedication of the Sanctuary began. It lasted twelve days, and every day was marked by a beautiful ceremony, conducted in turn by the Prince of each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

As described in the Torah later, in Sedra Naso<sup>1</sup>, each day the Prince of one of the Tribes brought a magnificent gift to G-d, as a personal offering from his own possessions. Every gift included a

large silver platter, a silver bowl, and a golden spoon filled with incense, and a number of cattle for offerings. In memory of the fact that these gifts were brought during the first twelve days of Nissan, in some communities the relevant passage in the Torah is recited each day<sup>2</sup>.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out an interesting feature in this episode<sup>3</sup>. Although each Prince brought an identical gift, the Midrash explains that each one had a different intention in his choice. There was a symbolic meaning in the weights of the platter, the bowl and the spoon, and in the number of different kinds of cattle. But for each Prince although the gift was exactly the same, the symbolic meaning was different<sup>4</sup>.

There is a teaching of the Rabbis that just as everyone's face is different, so our ideas and approach to life are different<sup>5</sup>. Yet G-d demands what looks like a uniform contribution from all of us. Every Jew must keep all the 613 Commandments, every non-Jew must keep all the seven Noahide laws. Like the Princes, our "gifts" to G-d seem identical.

At the same time everyone has a unique contribution without which the world would be lacking. The specific meaning of the details, their inner dimension, is where this individual contribution is expressed. For example, when a person prays he or she is saying the same words as everyone else, but each person's thoughts during the prayer are private and their own.

The episode of the Princes teaches us that in the global responsibility of Judaism no individual need feel lost. Everyone is uniquely important; indeed, each person, man or woman, is crucial for the fulfillment of G-d's plan for the world.

1. Numbers 7:12-83. 2. See Kitzur Shulhan Aruch, Laws of the month of Nissan, 107:1. The fact that these twelve days have a festive quality contributes to the fact that the supplicatory prayer *Tachanun* is not recited throughout the month of Nissan. 3. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1 p. 196. 4. Bemidbar Rabbah Naso chs.13-14. 5. Talmud Berachot 58a.

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### SEDRA VAYIKRA

#### **CONSTANT CONNECTION**

Sam and Zev were best friends. They sat next to each other in school, did their homework together and shared their snacks together. So, it was no wonder then, that Sam and Zev were spotted on a warm Sunday morning in the Synagogue, praying side by side.

As the boys looked intently into their Prayerbooks, their teacher, Rabbi Cohen walked by. “Boys, what a pleasure seeing you here, I am so proud that you both chose to come to Synagogue on a Sunday morning. You are really setting a good example for the rest of the class.”

The best friends smiled shyly to each other, their ears ringing with the wonderful praise. It was true they thought, it was an effort to come, but it was well worth it.

“Rabbi Cohen,” called out Zev. “I just wanted to let you know that the reason we decided to make the effort to come to Shul, is because of what we are learning in school in this week.”

“Yes,” agreed Sam, “What you told us about the offerings in the Temple really got us thinking.’

“You see,” continued an excited Zev, “we never really understood what the offerings were for. We always thought they were all the same and that only special people could bring them.”

Rabbi Cohen listened intently, waiting for the boys to continue.

“I always thought,” continued Zev, “that the offerings had nothing to do with us nowadays. That it was just something to learn about in the Sedra.”

“Oh – was it that chart that I gave you that clarified it?” Rabbi Cohen interjected, “the one with the different purposes for each of the offerings and how all of them helped the Jewish People keep a constant connection to Hashem?”

“Exactly,” Sam said. “The offerings were for everyone. And now our prayers are like the offerings as well. They connect us to Hashem.”

The Chazzan was starting the service. Zev hurriedly opened his Siddur to the right place, and Sam followed suit. After all, the boys wanted to make sure that their connection with Hashem was really strong.

“I can’t wait until Moshiach comes,” whispered Zev to Sam, “and then we will be able to bring offerings in the Temple.”

“Me too” Sam whispered. “Now, let us daven.”

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